A plan to reverse the growing nastiness trend

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Body

Across the country, we mourn the tragic loss of life of six of our fellow Canadians gunned down because of their religion in a mosque Ste-Foy, Que. The murder by a white supremacist fuelled by the Islamophobia of Marie Le Pen and Donald Trump stands as a shocking notice of what is at stake in 2017 and beyond.

The inauguration of Trump was met with the largest outpouring of anger in living memory. In Toronto, more than 50,000 women and men from all walks of life jammed Queen's Park in the largest protest in decades. Many in the crowd had never been to a demonstration, while others were veteran activists dismayed at the prospect of past gains undone by a vile demagogue in the White House.

In the first month, he proved the worst fears to be justified. His cabinet of billionaires representing oil and finance capital are determined to gut labour standards, public education and equality rights. Executive orders to build a wall against Mexico, bar Muslims are conscious steps to build a climate of fear and division against people of colour and immigrants.

In Canada, the Trudeau government is positioning itself to accommodate the new reality of Trump's America First doctrine. The cabinet was shuffled, the disgraced former PM Brian Mulroney was recruited and the Keystone pipeline decision applauded. Business leaders are trying to position themselves for future trade relations, while oil, gas and mining interests prepare to claw back measures for carbon pricing or climate justice.

There will be much to protest in the next four years. Hatred will spread as the most powerful man on Earth gives permission to xenophobes, racists and misogynists to act out their worst instincts. Workers' rights, equality rights and civil liberties will be under attack by Republican majorities and the Supreme Court. Federal right-to-work legislation has been tabled. Canadian demagogues, such as Kevin O'Leary and Kellie Leitch, will try to ride to power on the Trump momentum. It will become a much nastier world, and people may feel overwhelmed unless they see inspiring and effective response.

The spark of resistance was evident on Jan. 21, as millions repudiated the Trump agenda. The turnout of hundreds of lawyers at U.S. airports to assist those caught in the net of repression was a hopeful sign, along with rulings by a number of judges that challenged the legality of executive orders. Mayors and state governors have vowed to obstruct the repression against undocumented residents and a sanctuary movement is blossoming.

Canadians have already responded in rallies to support our Muslim neighbours and to publicly reject division and hate. No Canadian politician or businessman can be allowed to "normalize" the rule of Trump and the Republicans. Nor should they be allowed to mimic weaker rules on climate action, workers rights or corporate tax cuts. Securing economic justice so that people have decent work and dignity is vital to countering the despair that is a fertile ground for right-wing populism.

We need to be resolute in standing for the true values of Canada, but also be guided by the courageous last words of Jack Layton as he urged us to affirm our shared humanity:

"My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we can change the world."

But to change the direction the world seems to be heading, we need a comprehensive plan to address these troubling times.

Build powerful movements to challenge Islamophobia and all forms of discrimination, and deepen the equity agenda in schools, workplaces and the labour movement. Strengthen the refugee, migrant rights and sanctuary movements and support those in the U.S. who are working to uphold civil liberties. Rescind the Safe Third Country Agreement and repeal Bill C-51.

Strengthen the goal of good jobs for all. If NAFTA is being renegotiated, delete Chapter 11 and enshrine labour and environmental rights. Secure just transition policies for those affected by transformation to a greener economy. Defend public services and fight for fair corporate tax policies. Strengthen workers' rights and economic security.

Support indigenous peoples in their struggle to defend land and water, for justice for missing and murdered indigenous women, and implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Report. Justice in Canada cannot be achieved without addressing our relationships with the first peoples.

Defend the principles of professional journalism and the financial sustainability of Canadian media as a key component of democracy. We need to be informed in order to make effective judgments and to maintain accountability of those we elect and all those who wield power in our society.

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